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Reflections of Shakespearean Echoes in the Turbulence of *The Waste Land*

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“No other author had ever so copious, so bold, so creative on imagination, with so perfect a knowledge of passion, the humours and sentiments of mankind. He painted all characters from kings down to peasants, with equal force. If human natures were destroyed, and no monument were left of it except his works, other beings might know what man was from those writings”.

George Lord Lyttleton

These words show the universality of Shakespeare’s works. Many writes have used Shakespeare or his characters or the episodes of his plays as literary merits in their works either an allusion or echoes. Eliot has skillfully used a selective use of Shakespearean materials in *The Waste Land*. This poem is an indication of the extent of the degradation of man. He has sunken so low into depravity that he prefers to live a life of ignorance and to disregard the fact that he is living a half-life or not living at all. April, the month in which spring begins, is no longer a joyous time in which new life is celebrated, but a cruel time of rebirth that reminds man that his own life is terribly empty.

The most important series of Shakespearean echoes are from *The Tempest*. The particular moment, Eliot refers to *The Waste Land*, comes in the second scene of Act I *The Tempest*. The scene is an isolated island, which is ruled by the magician Prospero whose fairy servant Ariel (invisible at this moment) guides the young prince onwards with his song, which refers to his drowned father. As he does so, Ariel brings Ferdinand in sight of Prospero and his beautiful daughter, Miranda. The young couple, of course fall in love. The whole is a moment of benevolent, magic and great poetic charm underlined by the melancholic thought of Ferdinand’s drowned father, Alonzo. As Ariel’s first song ends, Ferdinand declares:

Where should the music be? I, th’ air or th’ earth?
It sounds no more; and sure it waits upon
Some god o’ th’ island’ sitting on a bank,
Weeping again the king my father’s wreck,
This music crept by me upon the waters,
Allying both their fury and my passion
With its sweet air (106).

In the third section, “The Fire Sermon” we can see echoes from these lines.

While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gas house
Musing upon the king my brother’s wreck
And on the king my father’s death before him (441).

Here Tiresias, the speaker of these lines ironically identifies himself with Ferdinand, the prince of Naples in *The Tempest*, mourning the reported death of his drowning father.

Here the narrator fishing in the 'dull canal' is led by no such sense of magic. He is moving in a sterile land, there is no hope of a redeeming love for him. Rather he hears the music of the newly seduced typist and memorises the corrupted themes and modern sterility. Contrastingly, we see water and fishing as symbols of transformation and regeneration in the past, but now they have lost their spiritual significance.

The second echo in "The Fire Sermon" section"

She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.
This music crept by me upon the waters (443).

These lines are borrowed from *The Tempest*. The music is an ironic reference to the typist's gramophone record, while recalling Ariel's song in Shakespeare's play.

In the IVth section "Death by Water" Eliot draws a parallel between Ferdinand's 'drowned father' and 'the drowned Phoenician sailor'.

Phlebas the Phoenician a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, end deep sea swell
And the profit and loss a current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell (445).

Ariel's song in scene II, act I of *The Tempest* beautifully describes this:

Full fathoms five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made:
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
In to something rich and strange
Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell:
(Burden) ding-dong
Hark; now I hear them Ding dong bell (152).

Here there is a metamorphosis into something beautiful and fantastic; the 'sea-change' which all the characters undergo in their symbolic drowning.

In *The Tempest*, as in the fertility rites of ancients, the characters pass through a drowning eventually to emerge resurrected into a world of love and harmony. In *The Waste Land* it is not so. Phlebas only drowns and dies. The tides slowly pick his body away. Thus here too we can witness the contrast between mere death by drowning and death followed by resurrection into a fuller life.

In the second section "A Game of Chess" we see same line from *The Tempest*,

You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember
'Nothing?'
I remember
Those are pearls that were his eyes.
'Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?'"

But(439).

When pressed by the lady to say something the lover recites lines from Aerial's song in *The Tempest*. However the lines carry the meaning of resurrection, transformation into something higher and nobler through earth but here these lines carry no spiritual significance for him. The repetitive 'nothing' in these lines is reminiscent of King Lear's warning to Cordelia in Shakespeare's famous tragedy *King Lear*, "Nothing will come of nothing /Speak again" (Act-I, scene-I, line 92, 81). And of Ophelia's modest answer to Hamlet in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. "I think of nothing, my Lord" (Act III scene II, line, 125, 81).

In the first section "The Burial of the Dead" lines from *Hamlet* is recurring. It presents the spiritual degeneration all around in the modern wasteland. Even the function of the tarot pack of cards has degenerated by Madame Sossotris who is telling fortune to her clients using a wicked pack of cards. On one of these cards, there is the drowned Phoenician sailor whose eyes have been transformed in to pearls by the regenerating power of water. He symbolizes the Fertility-God whose image was thrown into sea every year to symbolize the end of summer. Phlebas, the Phoenician who has experienced death by water can be seen as a representation of baptism, the shedding of the sinful nature, and the acceptance of the 'living water' of Christ. The Phoenician sailor only drowns and dies. Drowning is a process of transformation, so his eyes have been transfigured into pearls but here there is no resurrection of Phoenician sailor like Ferdinand's father. Eliot used the echoes from *The Tempest* in *The Waste Land* contrastively. On one hand we witness, *The Tempest* with its love and benevolent magic, its drowning and sea change into fuller life and on the other hand, the comparison to the narrator who wanders in the corrupt modern world, saddened by what he sees and wracked by the memories of his affair. Here drowning has only ended in death. There is resurrection of sexual passion and religious faith. Even after the redemption offered by Shakespeare and fertility myths there is only the glimpse of debased tradition. The narrator sits by the "dull canal" is an embodiment of Fisher King whose deep psychic wound brings to the world destruction, despair, draught and confusion. From all these it seems that Eliot fetched the echoes from *The Tempest* to show how sterile the present world is in *The Waste Land*.

The brief reference from *Hamlet*, tragedy of revenge by the English playwright, William Shakespeare, can be seen at the close of "A Game of Chess". It is a particularly good example of how Eliot's use of seventeenth century poetry heightens the sense of squalor in the modern world. Hamlet has been driven to the edges of sanity largely by sexual intrigue - his mother's over hasty marriage to her husband's murderer and their subsequent machination over his affair with Ophelia. But Ophelia misunderstood that and was frustrated with Hamlet. This together with his father's unexpected death made her crazy. It can be seen in scene V Act IV of *Hamlet*,

I hope all will be well. We must be patient. But I
Cannot choose but weep to think they would lay
Him, th' cold ground. My brother shall know of it
And so I thank you for your good counsel. Come,
My coach. Goodnight ladies, goodnight sweet
Ladies, goodnight goodnight (68-73).

Last farewell words of poor Ophelia before drowning into the 'mad scene'. The pathos of her condition is conveyed in the snatches of the rhyme. She sings a song of St.Valentine's day the

rhyme is that of a girl forsaken by her lover through unfaithfulness. These lines are echoed in the second section of *The Waste Land* – “The Game of Chess”.

Goodnight Bill. Goodnight Lou. Goodnight May. Goodnight.

Ta ta. Goodnight Goodnight

Good night, ladies, good night sweet ladies, good night, good night (441).

These lines are parody of Ophelia’s farewell lines.

The scene is on a tavern where Lil and her friend talk about stalement of life and about Lil’s husband who’s returning after a long time from Army. But Lil is of old and ill looks. Her friend advises that if she can’t satisfy Albert he will certainly turn to another woman. Thus stalement and disintegration of domestic life occurs when sex is sought to be separated from procreation and is degenerated into a mere means of pleasure. Sex is reduced to a duty a wife must perform to please her husband, and children are an obligation, not a joy. Here we can also see the fear of Lil who can be forsaken by her husband like Ophelia. This shows frustrated love affairs can be repeated even after centuries and there is no value for relations like husband and wife but the importance is given more to sex by the modern man. Perversion of sexual values is clearly portrayed. One more suggestion thrown out is that she is not only old and ill but also perhaps is on the verge of death. Eliot seems to be tool echoes from *Hamlet*, which is full of dangerous and fascinating melancholy, chaos, collapsed values and denied love affairs. It is revenge against the dangerous lust.

The opening lines of “A Game of Chess”

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of seven branched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion(438).

These lines are a clear parody of Enobarbus’s speech in *Antony and Cleopatra*, a tragedy by William Shakespeare in 1607; one among his Roman plays. This tragedy is based on the intertwined lives of Roman General Mark Antony and Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt from 51 to 30 BC. Enobarbus’s speech in *Antony and Cleopatra*:

The barge she sat in, like a burnish’d throne
Burn’d on the water: the poop was beaten gold
Purple the sails, and so performed that
The winds were love-sick with them the oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
The water which they beat to follow faster,
As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
It beggar’d all description: she did lie
In her pavilion-cloth-of-gold of tissue
O’er picturing that Venus where we see
The fancy outwork nature. On each side her
Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling cupids,
With divers-colour’d fans, whose wind did seem

To glow the delicatèd cheek? Which they did cool,
And what they undid did(104).

The picture here is of the potent, stunningly beautiful and fabulously luxurious queen of Egypt.

The first line is clearly parodied by Eliot. In the tragedy, Cleopatra is in her barge on the river Cydnus scene II, Act II but in *The Wasteland* the scene is of a lady of high class society sitting in a chair in her room waiting for her visitor. Cupids are also mentioned in the lines of Eliot, like in the speech of *Antony and Cleopatra*.

In the speech we are told that Cleopatra's "strange invisible perfume" spreads out from the barge to the banks of the river. It helps to draw the people to behold this reincarnation of Venus. But in Eliot's poem the perfume is suffocating and threatening,

Unstopperèd, lurkèd her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid-troubled, confused(438).

'The carved dolphins' a few lines later mentions Antony's pleasure likened by Cleopatra to dolphins.

The man in "A Game of Chess", of course, is similarly left alone. He is deserted in a moral and emotional vacuum, and unlike Antony, cannot rouse himself to celebrate his love with a feast. Shakespeare's Cleopatra is described in terms of sexual promise and potency but the women in Eliot's poem are described as through an imagery and syntax that ally her increasingly to neurotic and violent. Eliot selection of this tragedy seem to be because of the over importance given to sex and sensual pleasures. The description of the room is also reminiscent of Imogen's bedchamber in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. The lady in "The Game of Chess" had neither the sprightliness of Cleopatra nor the tranquil purity of Imogen.

Then came the echoes from *Coriolanus* - Eliot's favorite Shakespearean tragedy, is suggestive of tragic selfishness. Coriolanus is the least amiable of Shakespeare's tragic heroes but yet a stone noble figure. In the last section "What the Thunder Said", while talking about three "DA's"- specifically about 'Dayadhvam'- Coriolanus is recalled by Eliot.

DA

Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, beach in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
Only at night fall, ethereal rumours
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus (447).

Modern humanity is self-centered. Each of us is living within the limited world of our own incomplete spiritual isolation from others. It is only at night during the sleep, when our conscious self is asleep, which we hear for a moment the ethereal whispers. We can achieve our spiritual salvation only if we regain our sense of community. But modern man is likened to Coriolanus, the proud, self-centered Roman leader. But he can be redeemed through sympathy and harmony with others. Here Coriolanus appears as a symbol of pride and egotism, which lead to his downfall. But Eliot advises modern man not to follow Coriolanus but try to hear the voice of God.

The "o o o o" in "A Game of chess" seems to be the repetition of the last utterance by Hamlet but here mocked by the lady to taunt her lover.

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag -

Its so elegant

So intelligent (439)

These lines echoes were from a very popular jazz song in the year of the first world war (1914-18). It was an American hit song of 1912 that is

The Shakespearean Rag

Most intelligent very elegant

That old classical drag

Has the proper stuff

The line 'Lay on Macduff' (56).

The last phrase, "Lay on Macduff" comes from *Macbeth*, one of the four major tragedies of Shakespeare, in which he explores the psychology of an exalted man and his wife driven to murder and consequently their own destruction through over riding ambition. Even if it is an American song we can see echoes from *Macbeth*.

Eliot, through the journey of Tiresias in this modern world, portrays *The Waste Land* and this journey seems to be an influence of Elizabethan period. The Elizabethan people ever had a quest for traveling and absorbing knowledge. The Shakespearean echoes are present in each and every sections of *The Waste Land*.

The Elizabethan writers believed in their own age, in a way in which no nineteenth or twentieth century writer of the greatest seriousness has been able to believe in his age. And accepting their age, they were in a position to concentrate their attention to their respective abilities upon the common characteristics of humanity in all ages rather than upon the difference in man. In the works of Shakespeare as a whole, there is to be read the profoundest and indeed one of the most somber studies of humanity that has ever been made in poetry. This seems to be the main reason Eliot had taken lines from Shakespeare's plays, the ever mesmerizing Elizabethan dramatist. We can see allusions from Milton, Kyd, Dante, Marvell, Middleton and so on, but the most prominent and repetitive reflections seen are from Shakespearean plays. In each plays these echoes has different roles to perform. The echoes act as parody, irony, comparison and even personification. In each level Eliot used these echoes to prove his theme more effectively and he is successful in his effort.

Shakespearean characters connect the past and the present by their incredible presence pointing to the true colour of life. Shakespearean echoes taken by Eliot are from *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus* and *Macbeth*. Except one romance all others are tragedies; full of quest for sensual pleasure, sex, greed, chaos, confusion and all these led men to destruction and this destruction lead to death where there is no chance of resurrection. The fact that men have lost the knowledge of good and evil keeps the natives of wasteland from being alive. In the kingdom of wasteland people do not even exist. They are hollow men, shape without form, whisper without voice and shadow without substance.

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